Revised

Nazism in *Bernie Gunther Series* of Philip Kerr

A Proposed Synopsis

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Introduction:

The present study aims to analyze and interpret the Nazism in *Bernie Gunther Series* of Philip Kerr. Philip Kerr is a British author who was born on February 22, 1956 in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father was an engineer and his mother worked as a secretary. He was educated at a grammar school in Northampton. He studied at the University of Birmingham during 1974 to 1980. He gained his master's degree in law and philosophy. Kerr worked as an advertising copywriter for Saatchi and Saatchi before writing historical thrill fiction in the 1980s and becoming a full-time writer in 1989. He was married to a fellow novelist Jane Thynne. They lived in Wimbledon, London, and had three children. He died from cancer on 23rd March 2018, aged 62. Just before he died, he finished a 14th *Bernie Gunther* novel, *Metropolis*, which will be published in 2019.

A writer of both adult fiction and non-fiction, he is known for the *Bernie Gunther Series* of historical thrillers set in Germany and elsewhere during the 1930s, the Second World War and the Cold War. Philip Kerr became interested in the 20th century history of Germany and, in particular, the Nazis. During his study in the University, he spent most of his time in writing advertising slogans. Meanwhile he researched an idea he had had for a novel about a Berlin-based policeman, in 1936. Following several trips to Germany and a great deal of walking around the streets of Berlin he wrote his first novel *March Violets* published in 1989 and introduced the world to Bernie Gunther. Two more novels quickly followed *The Pale Criminal* (1990) and *A German Requiem* (1991). In 1993, these first three novels were

republished as a one-volume trilogy which gave name to a new genre in fiction as a Berlin Noir.

He is well known for his *Bernie Gunther Series* of 13 historical thrillers. He also wrote children's books under the name P. B. Kerr, including the *Children of the Lamp series*. His debut, *March Violets*, arrived in 1989 and he began the *Berlin Noir Trilogy of Books*. It introduced investigator Bernie Gunther who has an instinct for justice. Kerr depicts in his work the political turbulence in Germany during the Second World War. Kerr wrote for *The Sunday Times*, the *Evening Standard*, and the *New Statesman*.

In 1993, Kerr was named in Granta's list of the Best Young British Novelists. In 2009, *If the Dead Rise Not* won the world's most lucrative crime fiction award, the RBA Prize for Crime Writing worth €125,000. The book also won the British Crime Writers' Association's Ellis Peters Historic Crime Award that same year. His novel *Prussian Blue* has been long listed for the 2018 Walter Scott Prize.

During 1992 to 2006, Kerr wrote a range of standalone novels including *Dead Meat, The Shot and a Philosophical Investigation*. *The One from the Other* continued Gunther's post-War story in the year 1949, and amid the chaos Gunther is a private detective helping a woman find her missing husband. The sixth *Bernie Gunther* novel, *If the Dead Rise Not*, won the CWA Ellis Peters Historical Dagger for the author in 2009. *Bernie Gunther* novels became a sought-after commodity with reprinting of Berlin Noir feeding public fascination in the character. Kerr's books now appear in 36 languages.

After taking Gunther's story into the 1950s, Kerr finally decided to show his readers what the War was actually like for a detective whose conscience could not be

part of Hitler's programme, but who as a German detective was forced to work amongst some of the worst perpetrators. Through Gunther's eyes, we witness both the physical and psychological conflict that goes on under a totalitarian regime. Published in 2013, *A Man without Breath* was the first *Bernie Gunther* novel reviewed on Crime Fiction Lover. It takes us back to 1941, and Gunther is sent by Goebbels to investigate a real war crime, the murder of 4,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest. This was the first of four five-star reviews Philip Kerr's *Bernie Gunther* books have received on the site. He also wrote *The Lady from Zagreb, The Other Side of Silence* and *Prussian Blue*.

On 3rd April, 2018 Kerr's *Bernie Gunther* novel, *Greeks Bearing Gifts* arrives, which is the Gunther's Post-War storyline. He is an insurance company investigator sent to Greece to look into a sunken vessel and an insurance claim. When it turns out the ship was owned by a Jewish man, who was sent to Auschwitz, and the ship's current owner is found dead, the insurance claim is void but Gunther is able to get back to more meaningful detective work.

National Socialism, commonly referred to as Nazism, was the ideology and practice of the Nazi Party through which Adolf Hitler rose to power in the era of Nazi Germany. Nazism is a set of political beliefs associated with the Nazi Party of Germany. It started in the 1920s. Party gained power in 1933, starting the Third Reich. They lasted in Germany until 1945, at the end of World War II. The word *Nazi* is short for *Nationalsozialist* in the German language. This means "National Socialist German Workers' Party". The Nazi ideology is based on various elements like totalitarianism, authoritarianism, nationalism, expansionism, antisemitism, and holocaust,

Nazism is a form of fascism and uses biological racism and antisemitism. Much of the philosophy of this movement was based on an idea that the 'Aryan race', which they supposed was better than all other races, and had the greatest ability to survive. According to the racist and ableist ideas of Nazism, the Germanic peoples were the master race. The 'inferior' races and people - the Jews, Roma people, Slavs, disabled and blacks - were classified as subhumans. To implement the racist ideas, in 1935 the Nuremberg Race Laws banned non-Aryans and political opponents of the Nazis from the civil-service. They also forbid any sexual contact between 'Aryan' and 'non-Aryan' people.The Nazis sent millions of Jews, Roma and other people to concentration camps and death camps, where they were killed. These killings are now called the Holocaust.

Adolf Hitler and his followers in the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) had a strong commitment to values and ideas. Under Hitler's leadership, the NSDAP developed its own ideology, which informed both its methods and objectives and only its 25 Points (drafted in 1920) and Hitler's rambling memoir *Mein Kampf* (1924). In many respects, Nazi ideology was defined by Hitler himself. It was contained in his speeches, policy statements and orders.

Nazism was one of three radical ideologies to appear in Europe in the wake of World War I. Nazi ideology was developed by intense nationalists whose only interests were the future of Germany and German-speaking Aryan people. The Nazis had no interest in starting an international movement, exporting their ideas to other countries or changing the world outside mainland Europe. Their chief concern was the restoration of German economic and military supremacy.The two cornerstone documents of Nazi ideology were the NSDAP's 25 Points (1920) and Hitler's autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (1924). At several times in the 1920s, Hitler resisted

proposals to expand or re-draft the party's 25 Points, declaring them to be "inviolable". This was probably a deliberate strategy: because Nazi ideology was only ever outlined vaguely or in general terms, Hitler was free to interpret or re-invent it as he saw fit. Yet despite this fluidity Nazi had some core tenets that did not change:

Authoritarianism. The Nazis desired strong government and extensive state power. They believed that government could not function effectively if it lacked the means to impose itself on society and enforce its policies. Decisions should be made by a leader with almost absolute power (a *Fuhrer*). All political authority and sovereignty rested with this leader, who should be trusted by the people to make important decisions on their behalf. No other political parties or organizations other than the NSDAP could be tolerated. Other groups with political influence, such as unions or churches, would be restricted or abolished.

Totalitarianism. To the Nazis, state power had few limits and could extend into all aspects of German political, social and cultural life. They believed it was the government's duty not just to devise policy but to shape, coordinate and regulate society, for the betterment of the nation. A totalitarian government must have the authority to control the press and unions; restrict civil liberties and freedoms; manage education and employ propaganda. Liberal freedoms from government power – such as civil liberties, individual rights and freedoms – were considered irrelevant and subordinate to the interests of the state.

Before total war, Nazism was a potpourri. Racialism and nationalism jostled shoulders with the socialistic revolutionary conservatism of many members of the middle class. Romantic ideas came from right-wing youth groups. Hitler could utter the gospel of anti-capitalism to workers and the gospel of profits to businessmen.

Nationalism. Nazism was first and foremost a nationalist ideology. It was concerned only with Germany and German interests: restoring the German economy, achieving economic self-sufficiency, rebuilding its military and providing for the German people. The Nazis had little interest in forming or improving international relationships, except to advance German interests. They detested diplomacy and despised multilateral groups like the League of Nations. Hitler and his followers had no intention of honoring or abiding by existing foreign treaties or negotiating new ones, except where it might help them fulfill their own objectives.

Militarism. Hitler and his followers believed that re-arming and expanding Germany's armed forces was essential for the defense of the nation. Rearmament would be carried out in defiance of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler also considered military strength essential for expanding the German state. The organization and culture of the NSDAP were fundamentally militaristic, as evidenced by the size and popularity of the party's paramilitary groups the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) and *Schutzstaffel* (SS).

Expansionism. The Nazis in general and Hitler, in particular, dreamed of unifying the German-speaking Aryan peoples of Europe, into a greater German state. To achieve this, Hitler believed his regime would need to acquire *lebensraum*, or 'living space', to accommodate the needs of the new Germany. This 'living space' would be seized from the non-Aryan people of eastern Europe, in countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia. The first step to creating this greater Germany would be to achieve *anschluss*: the union of Germany and Austria.

A 'third way'. The horrors of World War I and the global economic crisis of the late 1920s saw many people reject existing political and economic systems, such as parliamentary democracy and capitalism. Socialism emerged as one alternative

system – however, both Nazism and fascism considered themselves a ‘third way’, an alternative to both democracy and socialism. Hitler was famously hostile to democracy, which he considered a weak and indecisive form of government, too prone to interference and infiltration by destructive forces. He also despised communism, regarding it as a Jewish invention to enslave entire nations and non-Jewish races.

Economic sovereignty. Economic power, prosperity and self-sufficiency were priorities for the NSDAP. The Nazis sought the creation of jobs for unemployed Germans, the restoration of national prosperity, the recovery of industrial production and the rearming of the military. They believed the role of the state was to manage the economy, dictating what should be produced, allocating resources and managing labour. Unemployment would be dealt with by putting the unemployed to work for the benefit of the state. The Nazis had no objection to the private ownership of capital, provided these capitalists were willing to meet government priorities – and provided they were not Jewish.

Traditional values. Conservative traditions were a strong feature of Nazi ideology. The Nazis often painted themselves as a new movement but they were not averse to promoting or exploiting traditional values. Hitler frequently spoke of protecting long-standing German values, including Christian beliefs and *volkisch* connections to the land. He often harked back to the 19th century when Germany was ruled by men of steel like Otto von Bismarck and German society was relatively untroubled by disruptive influences like socialism, liberalism, democracy and women’s rights.

Racialism. Their dark obsession with race separated Hitler and the Nazis from many other fascist and nationalist groups. The Nazis considered Aryans – those of

Nordic heritage, with blonde hair and blue eyes – to be Europe's 'master race'. According to Nazi racial theory Aryans were physically stronger, more intellectually advanced and more culturally gifted than other European races. The Nazis saw races like the Jews, Slavs and Romany to be 'inferior men'. The Nazis embraced the pseudo-science of eugenics, that claimed society could be improved by adopting policies of 'genetic hygiene', such as the compulsory sterilization or euthanasia of the mentally ill or disabled.

Aim and Objectives of Study:

Philip Kerr is a significant novelist in the British literary tradition. His novels depict the elements of Nazism which is more visible in his novels. The proposed research work aims at making an analytical and interpretative study of the elements of Nazism in novels of Philip Kerr.

The present study also helps to understand the history of Germany and the impact of the Second World War on common people of the world. It also focuses on the Nazi government, its brutal dictatorship and suffering of the people before, during and after the Second World War. It will help to understand the particular period from third person point of view.

Objectives:

Keeping in view the above aim, the objectives of the study are,

i. To discuss Nazism and its characteristics as a theoretical background.
ii. To study the reflection of Nazism in the *Bernie Gunther Series* of Philip Kerr.
iii. To place Kerr in the tradition of novelists who focused on the theme of Nazism.

Hypothesis:

The novels of Philip Kerr reflect suspense, violence, terror, mystery, tension and conflict. It also deals with the elements of authoritarianism, nationalism, expansionism, racialism and anti-semitism. This will be explored against the theoretical background of Nazism.

Review of Relevant Literature:

Not much research in this regard has been carried out in any of the Indian Universities about the British novelist Philip Kerr. In *Bernie Gunther Series* he deals with guilt, suspicion, corruption, revenge, tyranny and double-dealing that laid the foundations for the Cold War.

"A detailed and nuanced portrait of Nazi Germany." - The Spectator

"Dark, complex, and relentlessly witty- a nearly perfect marriage of threatening background and twisted plot to a German Philip Marlowe" *–Kirkus Reviews*

"Blends high-powered storytelling with a surprisingly rich piece of historical re-recreation" *–The Independent*

"It is a highly entertaining book, imaginatively conceived and smartly executed. Although it stands as a remarkable work of historical fiction, fans of hard-boiled detective stories will not be disappointed." *–Historical Novels Review*

"A sophisticated thriller that brings the war and its aftermath to life" – *The Independent*

Scope and Limitations of Study:

Philip Kerr is a prolific writer of the history of Germany, especially the Nazis. He has written many novels, short stories, articles and non-fiction, but it is not possible to study here each and every work written by him. Therefore, the focus will be laid on his novels from *Bernie Gunther Series* for the present research work.

His novels can be analysed on various grounds or with various critical approaches. Many themes can be attributed to his narrative body of novels but it might be digression under the said title. Therefore, the present research will analyse his novels from *Bernie Gunther Series* in the light of Nazism.

Rationale behind the Selection of the Topic:

Philip Kerr has been the significant literary figure in the history of Britain. He has written ample literature based on historical elements and he has got many awards for his writings. Furthermore, it is curious to know the history of Germany before, during and after the Second World War. It would help to understand the impact of totalitarian government, dictatorship etc. on the lives of common people, particular religion, sect and nation. Not much exploration is done on Philip Kerr. Philip Kerr and Nazism are not much explored so the topic is selected.

Research Methodology:

Explicative, analytical, and interpretative methodologies will be used for the present research work. The focus of the study will be laid on the close reading of primary and secondary data available on the subject. The data will be closely read, analysed and interpreted.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

The tentative chapter scheme of the study will be as follow:

Chapter I: Introduction

i. Life and Work of Philip Kerr
ii. Review of Literature
iii. Aim and Objectives of the Study
iv. Hypothesis
v. The Scope and Limitations of the Study
vi. Methodology

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

i. Definition and Development of Nazism
ii. The Elements of Nazism
iii. A Brief Survey of Literature on Nazism

Chapter III: Authoritarianism

Chapter IV: Nationalism

Chapter V: Holocaust/ Racialism

Chapter VI: Conclusion

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